

Hillside, Clay County
The Hillside Community

Paper for HIST 558

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Although it was never officially incorporated, the community of Hillside in Clay County, Kansas was once notable enough to be included on some Kansas maps. It consisted of a group of rural people brought together by the construction of a schoolhouse, which was also later used as a church.¹ The school/church building provided much needed social contact to families isolated by farm life.

In 1868, Hillside Schoolhouse was built to withstand time. It had thick, limestone walls and was built on a hill, hence the name. Most Hillside students came from farm families, and were mainly of English descent.² Towards the end of the 19th century, Hillside community members began using the schoolhouse on the weekends for Sunday School. A number of different individuals taught the lessons, and on average thirty people attended each week. It did not take long before these informal Sunday lessons became more organized, acquiring a pastor, superintendents, and teachers. The deaths of Sunday School teachers in 1900 and 1901 threatened to end the weekly religious meetings, having caused congregation numbers to shrink below ten. However, they quickly bounced back to regular numbers the following year. In the 1930s, the Hillside congregation expressed a desire to construct a designated church building, but financial hardships caused by the Great Depression squashed this dream.³ Instead, the congregation continued to use the dual-purpose church/schoolhouse building until the Hillside Schoolhouse was remodeled specifically for a church setting in 1946. At that time, area students began attending other public schools in the surrounding area.⁴

During World War II, many of the young men in the community of Hillside were classified as farmers/Classified 2C, allowing them to avoid the military draft. Members of the

community felt relieved knowing that their sons and friends would not be casualties of war. This guarantee was later revoked when many of these farmers/Classified 2C were drafted and called to Fort Leavenworth in 1945. Fortunately, the war ended shortly after this occurred, and the men were discharged, returning to their families on the farms without ever having left the state.⁵

Daily routines changed constantly over the years because of the evolution of farming technology and techniques. The Sharps are an area farming family whose roots date back to the 1880s in Clay County. They held a large role in the development of the Hillside community.⁶ Ernest Sharp, who was a member of church congregation in the 1940s and 50s, recalled many of the old farming techniques that he used as a boy which are no longer in use today. He noted the change in farming from a profession with the sole intension of putting food on the family table to one that's goal is to feed the world by producing mass quantities of food, while also earning a profit.

Unfortunately for the Hillside community, many people were forced out of their homes when Fort Riley Military Base expanded in the mid-1980s. The church was bulldozed after almost 120 years of service to the community. Today, all that exists at the site are the trees that once sheltered the building.⁷ Few people remain who can share their memories of Hillside, but it is and will always be a part of who they are. Like many other communities that have disappeared from the Kansas landscape, Hillside serves as a reminder of the importance of schools and churches in providing much needed social contact during an era when rural farm life could be depressingly isolated.



Figure 1: Mr. And Mrs. Wayne Sharp (Wayne was a cousin of Ernest Sharp) were very active members of the Hillside. Source: Ernest Sharp



Figure 2: This is a miniature replica of the Hillside Church after its reconstruction. It was made by Ernest Sharp. Source: Ernest Sharp.

Endnotes

¹ Mrs. Elgin Sharp, Mrs. Ed Sharp, "Anniversary Homecoming" Hillside Church Bulletin 1965.

² Sharp, Ernest. Formerly part of the Hillside Community, interview with E. Sharp. Clay Center, Kansas, 16 September 2011.

³ Mrs. Elgin Sharp, Mrs. Ed Sharp, "Anniversary Homecoming" Hillside Church Bulletin 1965.

⁴ Sharp, Ernest. Formerly part of the Hillside Community, interview with E. Sharp. Clay Center, Kansas, 16 September 2011.

⁵ Sharp, Ernest. Formerly part of the Hillside Community, interview with E. Sharp. Clay Center, Kansas, 16 September 2011.

⁶ Sharp, Ernest. Formerly part of the Hillside Community, interview with E. Sharp. Clay Center, Kansas, 16 September 2011.

⁷ Sharp, Ernest. Formerly part of the Hillside Community, interview with E. Sharp. Clay Center, Kansas, 16 September 2011.

Sources:

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